

THE STUDY OF MAN

TOTALITARIANISM: A DISEASE OF MODERNISM?

Report on a Symposium

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THE healthy man, says Carlyle, is he who when asked about his "system" insists that he hasn't any; and it is true enough that many things get noticed only after they have ceased to function properly. We learned about the body through medicine and about the mind through abnormal psychology. In the 30's, we learned a great deal about 20th-century capitalism through trying to combat the depression. If we are nowadays absorbed in the study of totalitarianism, it is not, I would suggest, because the German and Russian experiences of it strike us as simply the latest instances of that timeless phenomenon, despotism. It is rather because we feel that we are confronted with a disease unique to Western culture of the 20th century and that we need to understand a contagion to which all present-day nations may be vulnerable.

That at least is the inference to be drawn

AT A conference of scholars in 1953, under the auspices of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (whose proceedings have been published by Harvard University Press in the volume *Totalitarianism*, edited by Carl J. Friedrich), it was emphasized by virtually all the participants that "totalitarianism" is not just the old "despotism" writ large, but a new disease peculiar to modern culture. Here ROBERT LANGBAUM gives an account of some of the most informed thinking being done on totalitarianism today and, while he agrees on its uniqueness, discusses to what extent the realities justify us in thinking it the logical consequence and universal affliction of modern Western culture. Mr. Langbaum is a member of the department of English at Cornell University. In December 1954 he reviewed George W. F. Hallgarten's *Why Dictators?*

from *Totalitarianism*, the recently published proceedings of a conference of distinguished scholars in the various social sciences held by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Boston, in March 1953. The book is by no means the best work on totalitarianism, many of its contributors—both those who delivered papers and those who simply joined in the discussions—having made more thoroughgoing and definitive contributions to the subject in books of their own. But it does offer a kind of consensus of scholarly opinion. For though the editor, Carl J. Friedrich, emphasizes in his introduction the sharp differences among the contributors, the ordinary reader is more likely to be struck by their all but unanimous agreement on fundamentals.

I do not mean ideological agreement. That is, of course, there—a respectable Communist opposition being as little likely, at the moment, as a respectable Nazi opposition. Indeed, it is indicative of the lack of a respectable Communist opposition that the participants in the conference are so generally careful to distinguish between Marxism and Soviet ideology. Albert Lauterbach tells us, for example, that "It would be quite hopeless . . . to look in the writings of Marx and Engels for an explanation of the twists of Soviet ideology and policy in our period." One gathers from such remarks that liberals feel they have absorbed into their own progressive ideology whatever might be respectable in the Communist opposition, whatever in Marxism might lead to more rather than less democracy.

The agreement I am talking about, however, pertains rather to method, to a certain consistency of vision. Such consistency among a group of social scientists is remarkable in this

instance because the vision is almost the reverse of the "scientific" or positivistic ("fact"-minded) vision usually associated with the social sciences. Not only do the contributors generally agree that totalitarianism is not primarily a political or even an economic and social phenomenon, that it is, indeed, nothing less than a total revolution of culture—but, in treating totalitarian culture, they are generally unwilling to explain it in such terms as economics or social structure, the struggle for power or the national history and character of the Germans and Russians. On the contrary, many of them take pains to show that such criteria cannot of themselves account for totalitarianism. They insist, in accounting for it, upon a certain residue of mystery, which they treat psychologically and, what is more remarkable, morally. It is this concreteness of vision, combining psychological and moral insight with empiric data, that strikes this reader, whose training has been literary, as essentially literary and even in the best sense of the word, "romantic." For the insights are used to expand our sense of the irrational and ultimately enigmatic nature of totalitarianism.

ONE sign of this consistently new vision is the virtually unanimous agreement on the historical uniqueness of totalitarianism. Mr. Friedrich begins his introduction by telling us that "no one before 1914 . . . none of the outstanding scholars in history, law, and the social sciences . . . sensed the trend which culminated in totalitarianism." The suggestion is that no one foresaw totalitarianism because no one had penetrated to what was really unique in modern culture. Thus Mr. Friedrich tells us that it is wrong to apply to totalitarian societies terms like "tyranny," "despotism," or "dictatorship," which are misleading because too narrowly political and because they connect totalitarian societies with past despotisms.

N. S. Timasheff does, it is true, modestly suggest in his paper that totalitarian societies might be considered to occupy an extreme point on a continuous scale of more or less restrictive societies, past and present, so that they differ from other societies less in kind than degree. But his paper is immediately followed by Mr. Friedrich's, in which it is argued that totalitarianism is unique because "it could only have arisen in the kind of context created by Christianity, democracy, and modern technology." (Even Chinese Communism, he says,

is associated with the reception of Western ideas.) Christianity establishes the "broad predilection for convictional certainty" and, as others are to suggest, the demand for an eschatology, a vision of "the end of days," even if of this world rather than the next. Democracy provides the political idealism and the high literacy rate which make ideology, the party, and mass appeal possible. Technology provides the means for total control of the society. It becomes clear in the subsequent discussion that Mr. Friedrich's idea is enormously attractive to the others and that Mr. Timasheff is distinctly in the minority.

Yet nothing that Mr. Friedrich says proves that totalitarianism cannot be described as despotism, with a modern difference—as scientific despotism, say, or despotism for the millions. Mr. Timasheff's hypothesis seems to me to be as useful as Mr. Friedrich's, if not more useful—provided the aim is to understand Nazi or Communist society for the purpose of coping with it diplomatically and militarily. But the aim of the conference is clearly not that, but rather to describe two such diverse societies as the Nazi and Communist (every one agrees in excluding Fascist Italy as not really totalitarian) at a level where they combine to form a generic phenomenon. Beyond that, the aim is to show how this phenomenon is connected with just those conditions in Western culture that are distinctively modern. In other words, totalitarianism is to be explained as the exaggeration or perversion of modernism.

Thus Mr. Friedrich describes totalitarian societies as "exaggerations, but nonetheless logical exaggerations, of inherent implications of the technological state in which we find ourselves." And Bertram D. Wolfe, taking his stand with Mr. Friedrich, adds that the uniqueness of totalitarianism is "rooted in the word *total*." "This totality," he continues, "is unique to our age. Luckily for us all, only a few societies have 'gone totalitarian' in the total sense, but we must recognize that a latent tendency to totalitarianism exists in all modern states, not excepting the United States today."

THIS tendency is, according to George F. Kennan, our former ambassador to Russia, the tendency toward "symmetry and order." Mr. Kennan warns in his paper against the modern tendency to allow "our sectional diversities, our checks and balances, and our deference to the vital interests of competing

minorities . . . to yield to the leveling influences of the perfectionists, to utopian dreams of progress and equality, to the glorification of conformity in tongue and outlook." In other words, it is precisely our idealism which endangers us. "All totalitarianism," says Mr. Kennan, "is only a matter of degree; but it is precisely in this fact that its mortal danger lies." The lesson we can learn from the relation of totalitarianism to modern democratic and technological culture is that "anything carried to its logical conclusion becomes a menacing caricature of itself."

The sense in which totalitarianism is a *psychological* perversion of modernism is indicated by Albert Lauterbach. He contrasts, in his paper, the healthy condition of medieval man who did not conceive of free thought, with the unhealthy condition of modern Western man who, having been brought up in freedom, rejects it because of his neurotic need for an absolute certainty even if he can have it only at the price of conscious self-deception.

The sense in which totalitarianism is a *moral* perversion or inversion of modernism is indicated by Hannah Arendt in her discussion of Mr. Friedrich's paper. Miss Arendt agrees with Mr. Friedrich, but thinks he does not go far enough. For Mr. Friedrich grants that totalitarian societies are not unique in their "moral obtuseness," that, "As far as amorality is concerned, Nero and Cesare Borgia yield little to contemporary dictators." But this "'totalitarian indifference' to moral considerations," says Miss Arendt, "is actually based upon a reversal of all our legal and moral concepts, which ultimately rest on the commandment: 'Thou shalt not kill.' Against this, totalitarian 'morals' preaches almost openly the precept: Thou shalt kill! The assumption, which can be seen very clearly in Himmler's speeches to the SS generals in Eastern occupied territories, is that this precept is as difficult to follow as its opposite. In other words, the peculiarity of totalitarian crimes is that they are committed for different reasons and in a different framework which has a 'morality' of its own. The morality is contained in the ideology, or rather in what totalitarianism has made of the respective ideologies which it inherited from the past." Nero and Cesare Borgia sinned against a morality which they themselves acknowledged even while violating it. But the totalitarian makes his own morality, and by its standards he is virtuous. He is neither immoral nor ir-

religious; he simply worships a different god, a god who is by our standards the devil.

BUT what is the inherited ideology from which the totalitarian derives his new morality? One wishes Miss Arendt had gone on to explain, for it is just here that the moral relation between totalitarianism and modernism comes into play. The "Thou shalt not kill" which the totalitarian reverses is a traditional, not a modern, commandment. But the ideology on the basis of which the totalitarian reverses it is, I would suggest, the carrying to its logical extreme of liberal ideology—of that revolutionary ideology by which the present nationalist, capitalist, and democratic order displaced the Christian feudal order.

In justifying itself, the democratic revolution denied the objectivity of the old social order and of the morality that went with it. Democratic ideology asserts that man is essentially good and has therefore the right to shape the social and moral order to suit his needs. This line of thought leads to the pragmatic doctrine—operative, as is several times pointed out in the conference, in both American and Soviet culture—that not only society and morality but even reality is man-made, that we know the world by acting on it, we make the reality we require.

It is not difficult to see the dangers of such a doctrine. Liberal thought has itself provided us with ample warnings against them; and totalitarianism, with its cynical manipulation of morality and reality, merely fulfills those warnings. Totalitarianism is, in this sense, a terrible joke upon us, a caricature of modern culture. The reflection we see of ourselves in the totalitarian mirror is distorted because totalitarianism, in following to its conclusion the logic of our position, ignores its life, meaning, and moral intention. Yet the exaggeration and distortion of the caricature does show, as only caricatures can, the character of our position by showing its characteristic dangers, the disease we are liable to fall prey to.

Goethe in *Faust* foresaw the dangers inherent in the modern bid for freedom. The dangers are dramatized in Mephistopheles and in the Mephistophelean element in Faust himself. Mephistopheles is the appropriately modern devil. Gone is the goatlike devil of the passions; the passions are just the element in Faust which are on the side of God. Mephistopheles is, instead, the devil of logical conclu-

sions. He makes for Faust's career of freedom a kind of ideology—in that he sees with perfect clarity that the career ought logically to lead to moral anarchy and moral degradation. He is proven wrong in the end, however, because he has not taken into account the passion, the reverence for life, and the noble moral intention which caused Faust to desire freedom in the first place.

THE difference between Mephistopheles and Faust is analogous to the one between totalitarianism and modern democratic and technological culture. Faust has within him the Mephistophelean element, the tendency toward anarchy and destructiveness. But he has also a great deal more—both the new expansive virtues of freedom, and the moral and emotional refinement, and sense of limits on human action, inherited from the Christian and classical past. In the same way, modern culture has within it the symptoms ascribed, in the course of the conference, to totalitarian societies. It has within it the moral and epistemological freedom of pragmatism. It has within it what Mr. Friedrich calls the "engineering approach to society." It has the dreary standardization and uniformity; the isolation of the individual within himself through the atomization of society, the weakening of extra-political groupings like family, class, and church; the usurpation of religion and of spirituality generally by secular culture; and the usurpation of culture and of all society by the state—the disappearance of the distinction between them.

Modern culture displays all these symptoms, but they are still tendencies. They have not been carried to their logical conclusions; they have not been pushed to a total ideology. They are tempered and counteracted by the virtues inherited from the past, as well as by the distinctively modern or liberal virtues—by humanitarianism with its empathic conscience, by the still strong respect for autonomy in matters of conscience and intellect, and even, in a society which is fast becoming one of job holders rather than property holders, by the still lingering respect for private property as the basis for moral and intellectual autonomy. For as Miss Arendt suggests, "No matter what our political convictions with regard to property are, it is a fact of the first importance that only property can materially guarantee individual freedom."

By repudiating both the past and "old-fash-

ioned liberalism," the totalitarians abstract the "engineering" element in modernism from the virtues, both traditional and modern, which might counteract it. This leaves them free to pursue the "engineering" element to its logical conclusion, expanding it to a total vision of human society and the universe. It is because the totalitarians worship the Mephistophelean devil of logical conclusions, because they are preoccupied not with fact, or even with idea, but only with what Miss Arendt calls "the logic of an idea," that she introduces the word "logocracy" to describe totalitarian society.

MR. KENNAN begins his paper, which is the first of the volume, by announcing that he has no theoretical knowledge of totalitarianism but will speak only from his practical experience of it. Yet in posing the question which is to be posed so often throughout the conference, whether "there is any generic phenomenon that we can identify and describe from actual experience as totalitarianism," whether there is "really some identity of essence as between Russian Communism and German National Socialism," he answers as follows:

"When I try to picture totalitarianism to myself as a general phenomenon, what comes into my mind most prominently is neither the Soviet picture nor the Nazi picture as I have known them in the flesh, but rather the fictional and symbolic images created by such people as Orwell or Kafka or Koestler or the early Soviet satirists. The purest expression of the phenomenon, in other words, seems to me to have been rendered not in its physical reality but in its power as a dream, or a nightmare. Not that it lacks the physical reality, or that this reality is lacking in power; but that it is precisely in the way it appears to people, in the impact it has on the subconscious, in the state of mind it creates in its victims, that totalitarianism reveals most deeply its meaning and its nature. Here, then, we seem to have a phenomenon of which it can be said that it is both a reality and a bad dream, but that its deepest reality lies strangely enough in its manifestation as a dream, and it is by this manifestation that it can best be known and judged and discussed."

This statement, involving as Mr. Kennan admits "a most profound contradiction," describes perfectly the general vision of the conference. For while the empirical and analytical approach of the papers cannot be too much

emphasized, the interpretations seem always to be directed toward a symbolic image, a kind of nightmare reality in excess of, or to use Mr. Kennan's word, *deeper* than the facts.

Thus, Jerzy G. Glikzman goes far toward establishing the nightmare quality when he shows, in his paper on "Social Prophylaxis as a Form of Soviet Terror," that terror is directed not against actual but against potential offenders, against people who, because of conditions beyond their control (such as ethnic, social, or family ties), would have reason to offend. Yet Mr. Glikzman is criticized in the subsequent discussion for establishing too narrowly rational a criterion for punishment. Paul Kecskemeti enlarges the criterion by suggesting that the terror is directed against the whole population, to induce people "to compete in demonstrating their loyalty." And Miss Arendt annihilates all rational criteria: "The only criterion is the scientifically forecast course of history itself, according to which certain crimes are necessary and for which therefore 'criminals' must be found."

In the same way, Alex Inkeles feels it necessary to introduce in his paper the distinction between *ideology* and *mystique*, in order to distinguish the irrational goal of totalitarian society from the rational means used to achieve it, in order to suggest that "it is just this combination on the level of the individual personality which makes the psychopath so dangerous," and in order to show "the totalitarian as the captive as well as the manipulator of a mystical theory of social development." In papers on totalitarianism and science, Raymond Bauer suggests that Bolshevism, though using a highly intellectualized rationale for its intervention in science (we know the world by acting on it, therefore the proletariat, as the most advanced class of society, is justified in making the reality it requires), is in effect as anti-intellectual as Nazism and Fascism. And George de Santillana begins by finding an analogy between the suppression of Galileo by the Church and the suppression of the geneticists by the Bolsheviks, but ends by declaring the analogy misleading. "We are not facing a static idealist orthodoxy, but a moving operationalist one. The scientific purges are an extreme application of operationalist views, in which whole ways of life are scrapped instead of abstractions, and what is considered expendable is not only theories, but the personnel that carries them."

The late Waldemar Gurian treats totalitar-

ianism as "political religion." It is the absence of the restraints imposed by tradition, as well as the absence of competition from traditional religion, that distinguishes totalitarianism from old-fashioned absolutism—in that the former is left free to dominate both the outer and inner man. Marie Jahoda and Stuart W. Cook begin their paper on "Ideological Compliance" by saying that the most frightening thing about totalitarian regimes is their apparent power to elicit not merely lip service but real inner compliance. They describe psychological experiments which indicate that most people tend to comply, and that we cannot count on the "national character" of any given country to protect it against totalitarianism. Else Frenkel-Brunswick shows "a parallelism between the social and political organization of totalitarianism and the structure and functioning of [the maladjusted] individuals who are susceptible to this ideology." Albert Lauterbach begins his paper on "Totalitarian Appeal and Economic Reform," by saying that economic reform is not "the real explanation either of the dynamics or of the wide appeal of totalitarian movements. . . . For the bulk of their followers, the economic reforms represent a rationalization of deeper emotional needs, not the real basis for political support."

AFTER all the subtle psychologizing and moralizing, the paper of J. P. Nettl seems curiously old-fashioned in the modesty of its aims. All Mr. Nettl seeks to establish in his study of "The Economy of the Soviet Zone of Germany," is that "the difference between Communism and other types of totalitarianism is fundamental as far as economics are concerned." Yet even this apparently obvious distinction is objected to, in the subsequent discussion, on the ground that it destroys *totalitarianism* as a generic term. Mr. Gurian suggests that the difference between the Nazi and Soviet economies is not one of "formal structure but rather of historical context and developmental phase." The Bolsheviks did not, like the Nazis, have to mask their revolution as conservative, and they have had more time to show their true colors.

The disagreement between Mr. Nettl and Mr. Gurian shows that it is possible to be right on different levels. Mr. Nettl is certainly right for all practical dealings with the two economies. Mr. Gurian is probably right for understanding the essential quality or direction of the two systems, as well as the direction of all modern societies. What that direction is, is indicated

in the same discussion by Miss Arendt and Ivo Duchacek, both of whom point out that as private property disappears, and we become employees of the state, the very act of staying alive becomes an act of political collaboration. To which Mr. Nettl replies that medieval society was also one of job holders rather than property owners, that "property-holding as a strategically important social function is one of limited historical duration," and that "the economies of Britain and the United States were far more tightly controlled during the last war than the economy of Nazi Germany." In other words, nationalization of the economy does not necessarily make a society totalitarian. This distinction argues against inevitable trends. It suggests that intention and the concrete quality of life make all the difference between totalitarian and free societies.

THE distinction also shows up certain dangers in the prevailing method of the conference. For one thing, the conference ran the risk of over-abstractness in generalizing at such length about a generic phenomenon of which there were only two examples and those two, as every one admitted, so widely dissimilar. No one can deny the essential psychological and moral similarity of Nazism and Communism. The trouble is that it is difficult to describe this essence without confusing it with the symbolic image by which we apprehend it. In describing totalitarianism "in the way it appears to people," to revert to Mr. Kennan's words, "in the impact it has on the subconscious, in the state of mind it creates in its victims," the conference runs the risk of falling prey to the myth of totalitarianism—as it exists in our minds as well as in the minds of the totalitarian rulers and their victims.

Not that the myth is without truth. Mr. Kennan is not alone in apprehending the truth of totalitarianism through symbolic images from fiction. *Nineteen Eighty-four*, George Orwell's novel of a totalitarian future, was again and again throughout the conference alluded to as a way of saying precisely what the facts only tend to say. Indeed, the drift of the papers is such that the allusions were hardly necessary. Any one who has read Orwell cannot resist making the comparisons himself. Bertram D. Wolfe didn't have to conclude his paper on the Soviet manipulation of history with an allusion to Orwell's Ministry of Truth. His whole paper reads like a footnote to *Nineteen Eighty-four*.

It is both a good and a bad sign that the con-

ference's understanding of totalitarianism should approximate Orwell's. On the one hand, it is good that social scientists should acknowledge the validity of the literary way of saying things, while the coincidence of their vision with Orwell's is a testament to the truth of both. On the other hand, it is dangerous to mix the languages of different disciplines, to try to apply the truth of myth or symbolic image to the world of action. The very virtues of *Nineteen Eighty-four* make it a dangerous book on which to base policy, say, or even the kind of understanding which might lead to policy.

Orwell's novel is powerful as a myth or nightmare or the ubiquitous propaganda poster of his Big Brother is powerful. It is powerful through a certain crude and humorless oversimplification, a lack of proportion, an omission of the fallibly, recalcitrantly human. O'Brien, the orthodox intellectual of the novel, is frightening because he is so infallibly what the Ingsoc ideology would have him be. The hero, who is our kind of man, protests against O'Brien's description of the Ingsoc plan for total domination of the individual: "Somehow you will fail. Something will defeat you. Life will defeat you." To which O'Brien replies: "We control life, Winston, at all its levels. You are imagining that there is something called human nature which will be outraged by what we do and will turn against us. But we create human nature." O'Brien turns out to be right. Winston is defeated and in the end recreated in the Ingsoc image.

The ending is the proper one for Orwell's novel. For it carries the totalitarian tendency of our time to its logical conclusion and thus exposes with frightening clarity the psychological and moral truth about it. Yet it is just this logically conclusive truth that we do not have to, indeed cannot afford to, accept in dealing with the totalitarian countries. We have as yet no reason to capitulate to the totalitarian doctrine of the unlimited malleability of human nature. We have every reason, both moral and practical, to go on insisting that there is a constant in human nature which we can count on to be outraged by totalitarian atrocities.

Nor is it only in the victims of totalitarianism that we must look for the human constant. We must look for it in the totalitarian rulers, too. We cannot let them make themselves, as Stalin almost did, the infallible abstraction that Orwell's Big Brother is. For Big Brother is a name, a voice, a photograph, but not a person. We

must, instead, drag out from behind the official idol of the totalitarian regimes the recognizable human beings who can hardly be, according to our assumptions, either so wicked or so virtuous or so cold-bloodedly omniscient as they pretend.

WHEN asked how, after having painted in his paper so grim a picture of the Soviet Union, he can still be so confident of our success, Mr. Kennan answers as follows: "I believe, sir, that Soviet power is active evil. But the closer one comes to its horrors—and I have been very close—the less one fears it. It is the unknown and the unfamiliar that one fears most." The danger of understanding totalitarianism only in its nightmare quality, as active evil, is that it removes the actual German or Russian scene even farther from us, making it more unfamiliar and therefore more fearful. Mussolini once said that he did not care if the Italians loved him as long as they feared him. We cannot afford to play into the hands of the totalitarian rulers by fearing them, by subscribing to their own myth of themselves. We cannot afford, in our discussions of totalitarianism, merely to give each other the shudders.

If we are to develop the kind of understanding of totalitarianism that will help us protect ourselves against it, we must be careful to distinguish the totalitarian nightmare from the variegated human reality—the factions, the inefficiency, the recognizable human motives—that must lie behind the monolithic façade. The distinction is not merely academic. The whole nature of our foreign policy depends on whether or not we make it. For if we consider the totalitarian state as a kind of collective pathological personality unable to save itself from its own "logocratic" momentum, then we must adopt one of two dangerous alternatives in foreign policy: either a policy of appeasement, of staying as far away as possible from the mad thing for fear of setting it in motion; or else a policy of preventive war, of fighting the inevitable war now, while we are still stronger than the enemy.

But if, on the other hand, we consider that for all the pretense of monolithic unity there must exist behind the totalitarian façade much the same divisions that exist openly among us; if we consider that there must be a war party and a peace party, and that the common people must certainly want peace though, like our people, not at the price of honor or essential interests; if we consider that there must be de-

grees of commitment and opposition to the official ideology, with the vast majority of people probably indifferent politically; and if we consider that even among those people who adhere to the official ideology, personal and national self-interest and self-preservation are not likely to be forgotten; if we consider, in short, that the enemy is no more likely than we to want to sacrifice survival for the sake of logical consistency—then the burden of reasonableness does not fall only upon us. We can afford to bargain with the enemy. We need not choose between applying all our force or none. Assuming that the enemy will fight only if he thinks he has more to gain than lose by war, we can apply just enough force to convince him of the advantages of peace. This is, of course, the strategy of our "containment" policy; and it is just this kind of understanding of the Communist countries which is behind that policy.

Mr. Kennan, the original exponent of containment, points the way toward this kind of understanding when he sees the possibility of evolution toward a kind of constitutionalism in the supposedly increasing relaxation of life within the Soviet Union—in the absence of revolutionary ardor among the young who were born and raised under Communism, in the Kremlin's loss of interest in the people's private lives, in the emergence among the upper bureaucracy of a snobbish and luxury-loving elite. Similarly, Karl W. Deutsch, in his paper on "Cracks in the Monolith," sees hope in the sheer human incapacity to administer an Orwellian total control. And David Reisman refers to his fanciful plan for a "nylon war" that will cater to the ordinary human appetites behind the Iron Curtain by bombarding the Russians with consumer goods.

It is interesting to note in this connection how much less menacing the Soviet Union has seemed since Stalin's death just because the struggle for power there has come out into the open, as has the debate over consumer versus heavy production. We have become almost confident that the Russians will not start a war, that their feelings about war are analogous to ours. It is the Chinese, instead, who have taken on the psychopathic look, and of whom we cannot be sure that they will not, if vexed, plunge us into war even at the risk of their own destruction. The Chinese Communists look this way because they are still riding the momentum of their victory. We cannot, therefore, be at all sure that their feelings about war are analogous

to ours. To turn these days from the newspaper items on Russia to those on China is like turning from an old rival about whom one knows the worst and with whom the quarrel has become an almost routine game, to a new menace that is all the more frightening because still unmeasured.

THE conference sums up, by the nature of its emphasis, the prevailing interest of the past decade, which has been to understand, through a subtle blending of psychological and moral concepts, the uniqueness of the totalitarian horror and through it the uniqueness of modern culture. But the very success with which the conference has done its work, together with the direction of its speculations on the future of totalitarianism, suggest that the time has come to restore a balance by considering not only the uniquely modern situation, but also the traditionally human situation behind it.

More attention ought, for example, to be given to the effect of national experience, if not national character, on a country's vulnerability to totalitarianism and on the form totalitarianism will take in that country. Consideration of just the Russian or Chinese situations, past and present, may teach us something about Communist reality that we cannot learn from abstract talk either about ideology or about the psychological and moral essence of totalitarianism. Indeed, as the Chinese have a chance to show their true colors, we may have to start talking not about Communism but about Communisms. Totalitarianism can, of course, be treated abstractly as a logical conclusion of modern Western culture. But the thing to remember is that it is just the countries with the least of that culture, the least democracy and technology, which fall prey to totalitarianism. Of the Western countries, Germany and Italy

had the least experience of democracy; while Communism makes headway in those backward areas of the world where the people want the fruits of democracy and technology without understanding the cultural ground from which they spring. In its practice at least, present-day Communism is the penalty for human failure. It is what happens to those backward peoples who try for a short-cut to technological modernity by avoiding the slower but surer way of total evolution—an evolution of political restraint, social conscience, and individual self-realization, all of which should accompany a technological culture. Communism is China's totalitarian short-cut to modernity as compared to, say, India's democratic but roundabout way.

In the sense that totalitarianism accompanies the movement for modernization and exploits technology and democratic idealism to exercise control, it is the specifically modern political disease. Yet the most modern of Western nations seem to have acquired, through long exposure to the specifically modern dangers, sufficient antibodies to protect them against the totalitarian disease. It is the nations new to modernism who are most susceptible. We must, therefore, in talking about totalitarianism, take into account not only the inherent conditions of modern culture but also the nature of the people exposed to it.

We have, in any case, no choice but to take people into account, to bank not only our foreign policy but all our hopes on the human constant in the Communist countries. For we can save the world from catastrophe only if we can appeal to this human constant, if we can through appealing to fear, compassion, or just plain self-interest and self-preservation, deflect the totalitarian "logocrats" from the logic of their position by making them see the reality of their position.